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CORRESPONDENCE.

The Treatment of 'Nomina Nuda.'

EDITORS OF 'THE AUK':—

Dear Sirs:—I should like to ask, through the pages of 'The Auk,' for further expressions of opinion concerning the diverse treatment to which *nomina nuda* are now subjected. The matter is one of such importance to those who deal hand-to-hand with the many-sided aspects of nomenclature that every effort should be made to bring order out of the present chaos.

A *nomen nudum* is a name—zoölogical or botanical, generic, subgeneric, specific or subspecific—which has not been defined and published in accordance with the laws of binomial nomenclature. Such names are generally recognized as without status, and therefore as in no way invalidating the subsequent application of the same term to another organism, or to the organism intended by the original writer when this, as is often the case, can be ascertained. It naturally follows that a *nomen nudum*, having no real status in nomenclature, may be disregarded; and if a subsequent author, wittingly or unwittingly, uses the same name again the

responsibility rests with him. With published nomina nuda such is the nearly uniform practice, from which there is little if any departure. If, on the contrary, a nomen nudum has never been published, if it exists only on a collector's field label, if it has never seen the light except through the alcohol of a museum jar, if it lies buried in some posthumous or half forgotten manuscript, if it has been suggested verbally only, and an author adopts it and defines it, and publishes it, then individual opinion begins to run riot. Instead of agreeing that an unpublished nomen nudum should be treated exactly like a published one, many writers consider that it has special prerogatives, and that its existence, to a certain degree at least, precludes the free subsequent use of the term. In other words, the writer who adopts a manuscript name is not universally conceded to be authority for the printed nomenclatural unit, although he alone is responsible for its publication, and in nine cases out of ten the paper in which it is printed will appear in indexes and bibliographies under his name only.¹ To some writers it seems proper that the responsibility for a manuscript name when published should be equally shared by the publisher and the writer of the label, arranger of museum specimens, or writer of the laid aside manuscript. Others, and among them the majority of botanists, ignore the publisher. Comparatively few show their regard for consistency by a uniform treatment of all nomina nuda, whether published or not.

This confusing lack of uniformity probably arises from two principal causes,—first, that the writers of manuscript names are often our personal friends, while the publishers of nomina nuda are most of them dead, and second, that it is difficult to keep clearly and constantly in mind that *nomenclature deals not with history, not with botany, not with zoölogy, but with names*, and that therefore the authority for a name has nothing whatever to do with the authority for a species. With regard to the first of these disturbing causes, if such it really be, nothing need be said. The second, however, which is undoubtedly by far the more potent, demands careful consideration, as it strikes at the root of the whole question of the citation of authority.

Unless we admit, as I fear few of us are honest enough to do, that the principal object in writing the name of an author after a nomenclatural compound is to tickle worldly vanity, we must, to defend this custom, show that it is of some advantage to systematic zoölogy or botany as a whole,

¹ A peculiarly apt example is furnished by a recent paper in the 'Proceedings' of the U. S. National Museum (Vol. XIX No. 1115). Here twenty-two new fish are described, "each in the name of the person responsible for the determination and description." Among this small number of species no less than eleven authorities are quoted in addition to the one which appears at the head of the article (this stands for only three!), and which—so I am informed by a member of the Publication Committee—will alone, according to current usage, be found in the index to the volume.

that is, that it is in some way an aid to those who have to deal with the enormously complicated and ever growing mass of binomial nomenclature. Such an aid the citation of authority undoubtedly is, but under one condition only — when it furnishes a clue to that cardinal event in the history of the name to which it is attached, its first published introduction to the scientific world. When the name of the authority cited fails to give this clue it is not only a useless encumbrance to memory, but also an actual addition to the inconveniences of our system of nomenclature. And this is the inevitable result of quoting the name of the writer of the nomen nudum instead of the publisher. To take a case in point: A few years ago Dr. J. A. Allen published a revision of a certain group of American chipmunks. Among the forms which he then for the first time described was one that Mr. C. H. Townsend had collected in Lower California and immediately recognized as new. On the labels of the specimens Mr. Townsend had written the specific name *obscurus*. This Dr. Allen adopted, and gave for authority 'Townsend MS.,' though the description and publication on which the name rests were wholly by himself. Suppose now that in a subsequent paper the name is mentioned as '*Tamias obscurus* Townsend,' a person not familiar with the trivial, so to speak, prenatal incidents of nomenclatural history — and no specialist can keep them all in mind — will waste time and patience in searching through Mr. Townsend's bibliography for a paper in which a chipmunk might have received a new name. When, after abandoning the false clue furnished by the citation he proceeds as he would have done in the first place had no authority been mentioned, and at length finds the original description in a paper by Dr. Allen, he may or may not feel repaid for his trouble by the discovery of the vaguely conveyed information that Mr. Townsend knew something about the animal before Dr. Allen named it. The citation '*Tamias obscurus* Allen,' on the other hand, leads unequivocally to the series of papers in which the name first appeared, and therefore very materially assists in tracing out its history.

While the tendency to quote the writer of a manuscript name as authority for the published term probably originated from the prevalent confusion of the authority for a name with the authority for a species or group, in reality no two things could be more unrelated than these, and as already stated it is with the first *and the first only* that nomenclature has to deal. A moment's reflection will show the truth of this assertion. No one regards Linnæus, for instance, as authority for the specific discrimination of the many American birds whose systematic names are followed by the abbreviation 'Linn.' He simply took the species described under polynomial names by other authors and applied to them binomial designations. Similarly when a species is originally described under an untenable binomial, and the mistake is corrected by a subsequent author, the latter alone stands as authority for the name, although he did not discover the species or introduce it to zoölogy or botany. A well known instance is furnished by the name *Calamospiza melanocorys* Stejneger. The bird

which bears this name was discovered by J. K. Townsend, who named it *Fringilla bicolor*, unaware that Linnæus had previously applied the same name to another species. The mistake was detected many years later by Stejneger, who substituted for the untenable name *bicolor* the tenable name *melanocorys*. There are here three separate entities: (a) a large, black-and-white finch for whose discovery and description Townsend is responsible, (b) a specific name *bicolor* applied to this bird by Townsend, and (c) a specific name *melanocorys* applied to the same bird by Stejneger. The finch belongs to the realm of zoölogy, its discovery and first description to that of history, while the two names are the concern of nomenclature. As the earlier of these is untenable it is rejected in favor of the later, for which Stejneger alone is authority, regardless of the fact that he had nothing whatever to do with the discovery and description of that particular black-and-white finch to which he applied the name *melanocorys*. I have gone into considerable detail with this example, because, remarkably enough, it seems necessary to force home the truth that nomenclature is like a good shoemaker who sticks close to his last and busies himself with matters historical, botanical, and zoölogical so far only as they aid him in understanding and manipulating the materials of his calling.

If therefore the name of the discoverer of a species is of so little moment when he himself has published his discovery, why should it acquire importance when he has published nothing?

As I have attempted to show, the citation of the writer of a manuscript name, when he is not also the publisher, accomplishes no purpose in harmony with the aims of nomenclature. The double citation of writer and publisher together introduces an irrelevant element, and where the burden to memory is already so great, any addition without compensating gain is to be avoided. Finally the single citation of the publisher alone fulfils an important end.

Very truly yours,

GERRIT S. MILLER, JR.

U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.